

**BEFORE THE  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of:	)	
	)	
Numbering Resource Optimization	)	CC Docket No. 99-200
	)	
Notice of Proposed Rulemaking	)	FCC 06-14

**COMMENTS OF THE IOWA UTILITIES BOARD**

**Summary**

On February 24, 2006, the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) released its Order and Fifth Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Order). The Order granted petitions for delegated authority, filed by five state commissions, to implement mandatory thousands-block number pooling. In granting the petitions the Commission permitted the states to optimize telephone numbering resources to further extend the life of specific numbering plan areas (NPA) in each state. The Commission also sought comment on whether it should delegate authority to all states to implement mandatory thousands-block number pooling consistent with parameters set forth in the Order.

The Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) notes that in granting the five state petitions for delegated authority to implement mandatory thousands-block number pooling, the Commission stated:

[A]llowing states to mandate pooling outside of the top 100 MSAs will delay the need for area code relief by using numbering resources more efficiently. Demand for numbering resources in these states is increasing in rural rate centers, where number pooling is not mandatory, due to additional wireless and competitive carriers entering those areas. The petitioners have demonstrated that many carriers are not participating in optional pooling and instead continue to request full NXX codes in these NPAs. The petitioners observe, and we agree, that mandatory thousands-block number pooling would extend the life of these NPAs by using the resources that otherwise would be stranded. Denying the petitions would allow carriers to continue to request 10,000 blocks of numbers when fewer numbers may be needed to serve their customers, which would further hasten the exhaust of these NPAs. We find that this is a special circumstance that permits us to delegate authority to these states to implement mandatory thousands-block number pooling.<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

The same “special circumstance” noted by the Commission is present in rural Iowa and likely is present in rural parts of many other states. Left unchecked, large quantities of numbering resources will become stranded and the life of individual NPAs as well as the North American Numbering Plan (NANP) will be irreversibly shortened. The IUB believes the Commission should delegate to states the authority to implement thousands-block number pooling at this time. With such authority, states will be able to act quickly to expand number pooling to non-urban and rural areas when necessary to more efficiently preserve the life of individual NPAs and the NANP.

### **Number Pooling in Iowa**

Based on NRUF Data<sup>2</sup>, Iowa is served by three larger incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs), approximately 150 small independent ILECs,

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<sup>1</sup> Order at paragraph 12, footnotes deleted.

approximately 60 competitive local exchange carriers (CLECs), and approximately 18 wireless carriers who have been assigned NANP numbering resources. It is the IUB's understanding that for the most part the three larger ILECs, the 60 CLECs, and the wireless carriers are technically capable of number pooling. Most of the 150 independent ILECs, however, are not technically capable of number pooling.

The table below shows the current status of number pooling within Iowa's five NPAs and within its 817 rate centers.<sup>3</sup> The comments that follow provide the IUB's perspective on why pooling should be expanded.

NPA	Rate Centers	Mandatory	Single SP (M*)	Optional	Excluded
319	137	0	0	61	76
515	104	39	15	12	38
563	109	0	0	60	49
641	223	47	20	63	93
712	244	14	26	98	106
<b>Totals</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>362</b>

**Mandatory:** The table shows that pooling is mandatory in only 100 of the 817 rate centers in Iowa. The 100 rate centers fall within the largest 100 MSAs or where there was a state pooling trial. Because of the rural nature of the state, pooling is likely to be mandatory in a smaller percentage of rate centers than in states with more urban populations.

**Single SP (M\*):** These rate centers also fall within the largest 100 MSAs, however, pooling is waived because there is only a single service provider.

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<sup>2</sup> NRUF or Number Resource Utilization Forecast Data is submitted twice yearly by carriers who have been assigned NANP resources.

Three out of four of these rate centers are served by one of Iowa's three larger ILECs, and in many cases blocks have already been donated to the pool. However, about one-fourth of these rate centers is served by an independent ILEC that is not yet pooling capable. Thus, if a CLEC or wireless carrier requested numbering resources in one of these rate centers, it would be assigned a block of 10,000 numbers, because the requesting carrier typically needs numbering resources sooner than the independent ILEC can become pooling capable. The populations of the towns served by these 16 rate centers range from a low of 66 to a high of 2,316. Each of the independent ILECs has been assigned 10,000 numbers to serve these populations, but most of these numbers will remain stranded because the populations are too low to utilize the numbers already assigned. If a second service provider obtains another 10,000 numbers in one of these rate centers, even more numbering resources will be stranded and wasted.

**Optional:** These 294 rate centers have at least one carrier capable of pooling. Usually it is one of the three larger ILECs or a wireless carrier that has become pooling capable. Because pooling is "optional" in these rate centers, the problem of stranded and wasted numbering resources persists, however. There are many cases where the volume of telephone numbers assigned to an optional rate center is already many times the existing population of the town served by the rate center. For example, the Harlan (712) rate center serves the town of Harlan, Iowa, with a population of 5,200. There are currently 60,000 telephone

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<sup>3</sup> This table was compiled from information available on the Pooling Administrator's website . See [www.NationalPooling.com](http://www.NationalPooling.com)

numbers assigned in the Harlan rate center, to two traditional ILECs, two CLECs, and two wireless carriers.

The “optional” classification continues to frustrate the IUB’s efforts to efficiently manage numbering resources. In February 2006, a new wireless entity began applying for blocks of 10,000 numbers in pooling-optional rate centers in NPA 712. Although pooling blocks were available, and the wireless carrier was technically capable of pooling, it preferred fresh numbers. The IUB worked with the wireless carrier’s consultant, and the wireless carrier eventually agreed to use pooling blocks only if they had not previously been assigned to another wireless carrier. In five rate centers, the only pooling blocks available had previously been assigned to other wireless carriers, thus, the new wireless entity obtained five full codes of 10,000 numbers. The populations of the towns served by the five rate centers ranges from a low of 1,350 to a high of 9,250. It is unlikely these full codes will ever be utilized beyond marginal levels.

As recently as April 2006, two municipal telephone utilities refused to provide pooling blocks for use by a cable telephone company that is establishing service in the same rate centers. Both rate centers are classified as pooling optional, and both municipal telephone companies are technically capable of pooling. The municipals refused to provide the blocks because it would require them to incur costs associated with querying the call-routing databases. The populations of the towns served by these two rate centers are 1,750 and 2,600. Fortunately, a wireless carrier serving the larger of the two rate centers was able to donate a block for use by the cable telephone company, but a third block of 10,000

numbers had be assigned in the rate center serving the town with the population of 1,750.

**Excluded:** Nearly 45 percent of Iowa's 817 rate centers are classified as excluded from pooling. Most of these rate centers are served by Iowa's 150 independent ILECs that are not technically capable of pooling. Most of the communities within these rate centers are small towns. Nevertheless, it is the IUB's experience that there will eventually be requests for numbering resources in many of these excluded rate centers from both wireless and wireline service providers.

The growth of the wireless industry in rural parts of the country has produced demand for numbering resources in smaller rate centers. Numerous optional pooling rate centers were previously classified as "excluded" until a wireless carrier obtained a full code of 10,000 numbers and returned blocks to the pool. Most established wireless carriers are willing to use pooling blocks if they are readily available. But if they are not readily available, they have no option but to apply for full codes of 10,000 numbers.

There is also growth of wireline competition in rural rate centers. For example, Mediacom is a regional cable television company that is rolling out cable telephone service in many small towns in Iowa. In May 2006, Mediacom told the IUB that it needs numbering resources in 53 additional rural rate centers to complete its service roll-out. Forty-eight of the rate centers are excluded from pooling. In addition, the IUB has recently certificated two other wireline competitive carriers that will require numbering resources in 19 rural rate centers,

10 of which are classified as excluded from pooling. Thirteen of the towns served by the 19 rate centers have populations under 1,000, while the largest town has a population of only 3,300. The IUB is concerned that the lack of pooling in these rural rate centers could require the assignment of additional blocks of 10,000 numbers so new wireline competitors can provide telephone service. The potential for more stranded numbering resources is undeniable.

Besides managing the demand for codes of 10,000 numbers in rural rate centers from wireless and wireline competition, Iowa needs to manage the demand from a single voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) service provider. WebPoint Communications (WebPoint) has partnered with 13 independent ILECs in Iowa to provide free VoIP services to anyone who requests it.<sup>4</sup> In late 2005, WebPoint told the IUB that it would need 200 Iowa codes of 10,000 numbers each year for the next five years (1,000 codes or 10,000,000 numbers). Codes for use by WebPoint are ordered by the 13 independent ILECs. To date, the independent ILECs have ordered 63 full codes – all in pooling-excluded rate centers. The IUB anticipates the demand for new codes for use by WebPoint will significantly shorten the expected lives of all five of Iowa's NPAs. The expansion of pooling in Iowa could be a tool to help the IUB better manage the expected lives of its five NPAs.

## **Conclusions**

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<sup>4</sup> The free VoIP services are marketed through the following websites: [www.freedigits.com](http://www.freedigits.com), [www.talkdigits.com](http://www.talkdigits.com), [www.hopedigits.com](http://www.hopedigits.com), and [www.faxdigits.com](http://www.faxdigits.com).

Because of Iowa's rural nature, rate centers classified as mandatory pooling are relatively few – 12 percent. Many more rate centers are classified as pooling optional or excluded – 80 percent. There is significant growth of services requiring NANP numbering resources where pooling is not mandatory. Where pooling is not mandatory, there are instances where pooling-capable carriers refuse to pool or to provide pooling blocks to new competitors. The IUB needs additional tools to manage and optimize the lives of its five existing NPAs. The Commission has previously noted that “mandatory thousands-block number pooling would extend the life of these NPAs by using the resources that otherwise would be stranded.”<sup>5</sup> The ability to expand number pooling when needed would help the IUB optimize numbering resources, prevent stranded numbers, and postpone the exhaust of its NPAs and the ultimate exhaust of the NANP. Clearly, the expansion of pooling is in the public interest.

### **Recommendations**

- The Commission should delegate to states the authority to expand number pooling beyond the 100 largest MSAs.
- The Commission should not tie the delegation of authority to expand number pooling to the expected life of an NPA (for example three years). States are in the best position to determine when the expansion of number pooling is appropriate and when it would best serve the public interest.
- There may be some states without adequate resources to adequately manage the additional delegation of authority, therefore, the Commission should allow states to opt-in or opt-out of any delegation of authority.
- When expanding number pooling, states should be permitted to use whatever procedures are appropriate under applicable state law.

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<sup>5</sup> Order at paragraph 12.



- Any expansion of number pooling by states must be conducted in accordance with the national pooling framework.

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